

Skinwalkers

From Wikipedia:

In some Native American legends, a skin-walker is a person with the supernatural ability to turn into any animal he or she desires. To be able to transform, legend sometimes requires that the skin-walker wears a pelt of the animal. In most cases, this pelt is not used in modern times because it is an obvious sign of them being skin-walkers[citation needed].

Similar lore can be found in cultures throughout the world and is often referred to as shapeshifting by anthropologists.

Possibly the best documented skinwalker beliefs are those relating to the Navajo yee naaldlooshii (literally "with it, he goes on all fours" in the Navajo language). A yee naaldlooshii is one of several varieties of Navajo witch (specifically an 'ánti'jhnii or practitioner of the Witchery Way, as opposed to a user of curse-objects ('adagash) or a practitioner of Frenzy Way ('azhıtee)). Technically, the term refers to an 'ánt'jhnii who is using his (rarely her) powers to travel in animal form. In some versions, men or women who have attained the highest level of priesthood are called clizyati, "pure evil", when they commit the act of killing a close blood relative(sister, brother, mother, father), incest, or necrophilia. This act is said to destroy their humanity and allow them to fully immerse themselves in the teachings of the Witchery Way.

The 'ánt'jhnii are human beings who have gained supernatural power by breaking a cultural taboo. Specifically, a person is said to gain the power to become a yee naaldlooshii upon initiation into the Witchery Way. This is done especially via the Navajo equivalent of the 'Black Mass', a perverted "sing" (Navajo ceremonial) used to curse instead of to heal. Both men and women can become 'ánt'jhnii and therefore possibly skinwalkers, but men are far more numerous. It is generally thought that only childless women can become witches. Not every witch is a skin walker, but every skin walker is a witch.

Although a skinwalker is most frequently seen as a coyote, wolf, fox, eagle, owl, or crow the yee naaldlooshii is said to have the power to assume the form of any animal they choose, a decision based on what specific abilities are needed. For example, Witches may use a bird form for expedient travel in pursuit, escape, or otherwise. Some Navajo also believe that skinwalkers have the ability to steal the face of a person. The Navajo believe that if you ever lock eyes with a skinwalker, they can absorb themselves into your body. Alternately, some Navajos believe that if you make eye contact with a skinwalker, your body will freeze up due to the fear of them and the skinwalker will use that fear to gain power and energy.

A skinwalker is usually described as hairy, except for an animal skin. Some Navajos describe them as a perfect version of the animal in question. The skin may just be a mask, like those which are the only garment worn in the witches' sing, which is the opposite of the good sing. Because animal skins are used primarily by skinwalkers, the pelt of animals such as bears, coyotes, wolves, and cougars are considered taboo. Sheepskin and buckskin are probably two of the few hides used by Navajos; the others are not used for ceremonial purposes.

Often, Navajo people will tell of their encounter with a skinwalker, though many hesitate to reveal the story to non-Navajos, or to talk of such things at night. Sometimes the skinwalker will try to break into the house and attack the people inside, and will often bang on the walls of the house, knock on the windows, and climb onto the roofs. Sometimes, a strange, animal-like figure is seen standing outside the window, peering in. Other times, a skinwalker may attack a vehicle and cause a car accident. The skinwalkers are described as being fast, agile, and impossible to catch. Though some attempts have been made to shoot or kill one, they are not usually successful. Sometimes a skinwalker will be tracked down, only to lead to the house of someone known to the tracker. As in European werewolf lore, sometimes a wounded skinwalker will escape, only to have someone turn up later with a similar wound which reveals them to be the witch. It is said that if

a Navajo was to know the person behind the skinwalker they had to pronounce the full name, and about three days later that person would either get sick or die for the wrong that they have committed.

Legend has it skinwalkers can have the power to read human thoughts. They also possess the ability to make any human or animal noise they choose. A skinwalker may use the voice of a relative or the cry of an infant to lure victims out of the safety of their homes; the skin walkers cannot enter a home without invitation.

The yee naaldlooshi are distinguishable in human form because their eyes glow like an animal's. In animal form they can be spotted by moving stiffly and unnaturally, and their eyes do not glow like an animal's.

Skinwalkers use charms to instill fear and control in their victims. Such charms include human bone beads launched by blowguns, which embed themselves beneath the surface of the skin without leaving a mark, and human bone dust which can cause paralysis and heart failure. Skinwalkers have been known to find traces of their victim's hair, wrap it around a pot shard, and place it into a tarantula hole. Even live rattlesnakes are known to be used as charms by the skinwalker. A skinwalker can use anything of personal belongs and use in ceremonial rituals against the person they are doing evil against.

Skin-walkers use a powder called corpse dust, also known as corpse poison, corpse powder, and án't'i, to poison victims. Corpse dust is composed of ground infant bones, preferably twin infants, and bones from the fingertips and back of the skull. The yee naaldlooshi blow it into the faces of their victims, or down the chimney of the victims' home. Soon after the victim breathes the dust the tongue starts to swell and blacken, and they go into convulsions and die.